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Appropriations Committees Feud On Appropriate Meeting Place

By Richard L. Lyons
Staff Reporter

The House and Senate Appropriations Committees have been quietly but heatedly feuding all year over prerogatives—of which the House feels it has too few.

Last year the House finally won equal billing in the Congressional Record by having its daily proceedings printed first on alternate days. Senate talk had always gone first until then.

Now the House Appropriations Committee is trying to break the century-old custom that conferences to settle differences between the Houses on money bills are always held on the Senate side of the Capitol.

Conference Request

Early this year the House Committee adopted a resolution announcing it wanted half the conferences held on the House side. The Senate Appropriations Committee solemnly replied that this would be acceptable if the House let the Senate originate half the appropriations bills.

This hit a raw nerve and was summarily turned down. Though the Constitution requires only that "revenue" measures originate in the House, the House has construed that to include appropriations as well. It has refused even to receive appropriations bills sent over from the Senate. This is one of the few areas where the House holds the whip hand and it is not about to give it up.

At the moment these two most powerful committees in Congress are glaring at each other from their respective offices while the bills begin to pile up.

Only one conference meeting has been held this year. House conferees went over to the Senate three weeks ago to start work on the Treasury-Post Office money bill for next year. They did not finish at the first meeting and they have not met since. The House will not go to the Senate and vice versa.

A 500-million-dollar supplemental bill containing funds needed by several agencies now has been waiting a week for a conference. The House, as part of the war of nerves, failed to name conferees last week and now has gone off on a week's vacation.

More is involved than the long walk across the Capitol, but that is part of it. House members have long been irked by a number of big and little things which periodically erupt in something like this.

They complain that they often have to trudge back to the House two or three times to answer roll calls during a conference. They say they go over in a body to work, while Senators flit in and out.

In Enemy Territory

The House group also has an uneasy feeling it is in enemy territory all the time and wants to get on even ground.

This is part of the running fight made by the House over the years to maintain at least an equal position in the face of growing Senate power. Many House members believe the Founding Fathers intended their popular branch to be the more important.

Oldtimers in the House take

The late Speaker Sam Rayburn would never go over to the Senate. The only time he was seen there in recent years was eating dinner during one late session when the House restaurant was closed.

The House considers the Senate especially unreliable in money matters. The House Appropriations Committee feels that it does all the hard work listening to witnesses for months on each bill, only to have the Senate Committee sit as a court of appeals and, with little more than a cursory glance, restore most of the funds cut.

Back-door spending, that ingenious device to do an end run around the conservative House Appropriation Committee, is a favorite of the Senate. The House was tickled on adjournment night last year, when it was able to repeal three back-door spending programs in a catch-all bill, and then go home, forcing the Senate to accept the package.

Sen. Carl Hayden (D-Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said yesterday he didn't know how the conference problem would work out. He indicated the next move was up to the House. Chairman Clarence Cannon (D-Mo.) of the House Committee couldn't be reached.